A GUIDE TO BETTER AUDIO FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS
Great audio has never played a more important role in business communications, whether you’re making an important business video call, managing a team remotely using a conferencing app, creating video content for your marketing strategy, or making a podcast to share information with your team.

As with all forms of business communications, the quality of your audio says a lot about your company. In order to get your message across effectively, whatever your purpose may be, your audio needs to be clean and clear. Thankfully, there isn’t any secret to great audio and you don’t need to outsource to a professional to achieve it. With the right tools and some basic knowledge of audio equipment and production, you can easily create powerful communications that cut through the noise.

In this easy to understand guide, we’ll be offering some simple tips for better audio and useful information on how to vastly improve your business communications, as well as strategic advice on choosing, managing and planning your comms activities.

To find out more about audio solutions for business, including video guides and advice on what equipment you need, head to rode.com/remoteworking

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About RØDE Microphones

RØDE Microphones is one of the world’s leading audio technology companies. We design and manufacture high-quality microphones and related accessories for studio, live, location and home use. RØDE is a uniquely Australian owned and operated company; our products are designed and manufactured in Sydney and exported to 118 countries globally. RØDE is part of The Freedman Group, with APHEX, Event and SoundField. Freedman Electronics celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017.
PODCAST, VIDEO OR WEBINAR?

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

In a world where we are increasingly working remotely or in isolation, many business interactions have moved online. Video conferencing is now the go-to, with the eponymous Zoom app as the new hero.

But before you send out yet another invitation to your video-conference-fatigued colleagues, stop and consider whether there might be a better way to get your message across.

Podcasts and videos are quick and easy to create and offer some distinct advantages. Here is a run-down of some communication options you might not have considered.

PODCASTS

A podcast is simply an audio recording on a specific topic. It can be as simple as a recorded message from one person, or a more elaborate production with multiple guests, interviews, music and more.

Podcasts are a great way to deliver information to staff or clients as they can easily be absorbed whilst doing everyday tasks, such as driving or taking lunch. They work best for delivering information that is more personal in nature – for example, team updates, overall business performance or motivational exercises. We’ll look more closely at how easy podcasting can be a bit later on.

VIDEO PRESENTATIONS

A video presentation doesn’t need to be an elaborate production. A simple ‘talking head’ video message helps remote staff stay connected and informed, without the technical and logistical challenges of a video conference. With some simple editing skills, it’s easy to include PowerPoint slides or other media elements, making this a great choice when you want to present more detailed information, for example, financial information or a pricing proposal. Below we’ll show you how to get great audio for your video content.

WEBINARS AND LIVESTREAMS

A webinar or livestream is a video presentation that is viewed live online. It is different from a video conference, as participants watch it like TV, rather than being in the video themselves. They can interact and ask questions by text chat, but not interrupt or speak. If you have a company announcement to present to everyone at the same time, this may be a better method than a video conference as less internet bandwidth is required by the participants, and the connection is often more reliable.
How To Improve Audio Quality For Your Video Conferences

GET MORE OUT OF YOUR REMOTE VIDEO CALLS WITH BETTER AUDIO

Video conferencing is rapidly becoming the new normal in business communications. Whether you’re hosting meetings with a team working from home, having a one-on-one with a colleague, or giving a presentation remotely, using video conferencing apps like Zoom, Skype and Google Hangouts is a great way to stay connected in the modern workplace.

Poor audio quality makes video conferencing hard work for everybody. The microphones built into computers aren’t great quality and will make your voice sound tinny and distant, which can make communication very difficult. Let’s look at some easy ways to vastly improve your audio.

USE AN EXTERNAL MICROPHONE

Using an external microphone is the single most effective way to improve audio quality for your video calls. As mentioned, the microphones in desktop and laptop computers are relatively poor as they are not designed for high-quality audio recording. By simply using an external microphone, your audio will sound richer and clearer.

The simplest solution we recommend is to use a USB microphone, such as the RØDE NT-USB or NT-USB Mini. These compact microphones are simple to set up and use, and will deliver crystal-clear, professional-quality audio for your video calls.

1. Plug your microphone into your computer’s USB port
2. Go to your computer’s audio settings and select the microphone as your input and output source
3. Plug headphones into your microphone
4. Open up your video conferencing app and start chatting!

If you want to adjust the level of your microphone, this can be controlled in your computer’s audio settings. Some video call apps, such as Skype, let you set your audio level in the app settings. However, if you’re close to your microphone in a relatively quiet room, you shouldn’t need to adjust at all.

5 GOLDEN RULES FOR CHAIRING A VIDEO CONFERENCE

1. Keep invite lists as small as possible
2. Allow five minutes for everyone to get connected. Have a 9.00am ‘connect’ time, and a 9.05am kick-off for the first item. And make sure you are there on time!
3. Encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they are not speaking
4. Encourage people to not speak over each other. Let each person finish, and then invite others to respond
5. Be human. Technology can make us impersonal, so make a point of asking how people are feeling

A FEW FINAL TIPS...

If you are on a large call with multiple people, get into the habit of muting your microphone when you are not speaking. You can usually do this easily from within the video conferencing app.

Encouraging your colleagues to use an external microphone, wear headphones and mute their mics too can make the difference between a clear and relaxing meeting and one that’s hard work and uncomfortable to listen to.

THINK ABOUT YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Before your call, you need think about your immediate environment. If you’re at home, choose a room that has the least reflective surfaces. Wooden floors and large spaces aren’t ideal as you’ll introduce echo to your recordings, which will make your audio hard to listen to. Instead, go for smaller spaces with carpets or rugs, like a bedroom or study. Minimise any extraneous noise like air conditioners or music playing in the background.

Closing windows or doors will help to reduce noise from traffic or aircraft.

MIC TECHNIQUE

You’ll want to make sure your mic is close to your mouth to get clear audio. As long as you are roughly a foot away from the microphone with your face directed towards the front of it, you should hear yourself loud and clear.

You may also want to consider using a RØDE DS1 desk stand or PSA1 studio arm to get your mic nice and close to your mouth. Both of these options are compatible with all RØDE USB microphones.

PRO TIP

RØDE USB microphones feature a zero-latency monitoring mode, which will send the audio from the mic directly to your headphones, so you can hear yourself talk. We recommend using this when on a conference call.
How to make a podcast for your business

Podcasting is an incredibly powerful marketing tool for businesses. It’s a great way to communicate your brand identity, build authority, and reach a new audience. It’s also a great internal business communications tool; many top companies are using private podcast platforms as a way to provide staff with training material, deliver training material to employees, or communicate with prospective clients.

Regardless of why you’re creating a podcast, audio is very important. Below, we’ll show you how easy it is to create a great-sounding podcast.

**STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR AUDIO INTERFACE**

Contrary to what you might think, you don’t need a professional studio and tonnes of equipment to make a podcast. With some easy-to-use tools and basic audio knowledge, you can create recordings that sound fantastic and will engage your listeners.

When choosing your equipment, you should think about how many people will be on your podcast. If it’s a one or two-person show, or will you have guests?, if you want to be able to integrate remote phone calls easily, you’ll need to connect a smartphone to stream music and other media, or if you want access to advanced editing and sound design options.

There are two products we recommend that make podcast production incredibly simple:

**OPTION 1: USB MICROPHONE**

USB microphones are a great option if your podcast has just one presenter. There are a number of great USB mics in the RØDE range, including the Podcaster, NT-USB, NT-USB Mini and VideoMic NTG.

For a compact, easy-to-use solution, we recommend the NT-USB Mini. This is a simple plug-and-play USB microphone that requires no additional software to work – just plug it into your computer using the supplied cable, plug your headphones in, select it as your input and output device in your computer’s audio settings, and you’re ready to record.

If you’re recording with a USB microphone, you will need to use computer software to record your podcast. A simple option is Anchor, an online recording app that is also a hosting service so you can publish your podcast directly to platforms like Spotify and Apple Podcasts. If you need more editing options, you can use a digital audio workstation (DAW), such as GarageBand, which comes free with every Mac computer, or Audacity if you use Windows (also free to download). Learn more about editing in the last section of this book.

**OPTION 2: THE RØDECASTER PRO**

If your podcast has more than one presenter, or if you will regularly have guests on your show, the RØDECaster Pro is the best option. This is an incredibly powerful yet easy-to-use podcasting console that features four microphone channels for hosting up to four presenters/guests, channels for recording phone calls, sound pads for triggering jingles and sound effects, and advanced editing options.

With the RØDECaster Pro, you can record directly to a microSD card with the touch of a button, or record to a computer via USB like you would with a USB microphone. It is the easiest way to create professional-quality podcasts at home or in the office.

**STEP 2: CHOOSE A MICROPHONE**

If you are using a USB microphone, then you don’t need to worry about this step, as it is both an audio interface and a microphone.

**STEP 3: CHOOSING YOUR RECORDING SPACE**

Before you start your podcast, you’ll need to consider where you’ll be recording. Like with any recording scenario, your environment will have a huge impact on the quality of your audio. Remember that a room with lots of reflective surfaces, such as wood, tiles or concrete, will give your podcasts an unpleasant echo-y sound. Choose a quiet space with carpet and curtains to help dampen this sound. Bedrooms, lounge rooms, and small offices are all great options.

**STEP 4: RECORD YOUR PODCAST**

Now you’re ready to record your podcast! How you approach this will depend on what kind of podcast you are creating, what kind of equipment you are using, and how much control you want over your audio and editing options.

To ensure that your podcast hits all of your key messages and your communication is clear and impactful, it’s a good idea to plan ahead. You do not need to script the entire episode (in fact, this can be detrimental), but mapping out your key points and preparing any extra material – such as interview questions – ahead of time will help your podcast come together when you edit it.

If you are recording a simple one-person podcast with a USB microphone, you can use any recording software, from basic tools like QuickTime, to online apps like Anchor, to digital audio workstations like GarageBand. All of these are very simple to use.

With the RØDECaster Pro, you can record your entire podcast directly to the console’s on-board microSD card with the press of a button. This recording can be transferred to your computer to be edited and published. Or you can record directly to your computer’s recording software via USB, like you would if you were using USB microphone.

**STEP 5: EDIT YOUR PODCAST**

Editing your podcast after you have recorded it will make it sound more professional. Recording software like GarageBand has all the tools you need to make your podcasts shine. You can remove sections that weren’t quite right, adjust the level of your recording, add music and sound effects, splice together recordings that were made at different times, apply effects and processing to your voice and much more. If you don’t want to trouble yourself with editing, that’s fine too. However, we do recommend you ensure that the level of your recording is loud enough for when you publish it. We’ll take a look at simple editing tools in more depth in a later section, so read on!

**STEP 6: PUBLISH YOUR PODCAST**

Once you are happy with your podcast, you can publish it to podcast streaming platforms for people to listen to. We recommend two hosting services: Anchor and Whooshkaa. Both of these are free, easy-to-use services that will automatically publish your podcast to all major streaming platforms.

Anchor is a good option if your podcast is for public consumption. It’s very easy to use, features an in-built recording app if you need it, and offers straightforward analytics so you can track your podcast’s growth and see who is listening in.

Whooshkaa is a good option if your podcast is only for internal purposes only – that is, if you want complete control over who can listen to it. Their Private Podcasts service allows you to do just that: publish your podcasts privately, so that only people you select can access it.

7 ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PODCAST PLAN

- An introduction
- A summary of the episode
- Guest introductions
- Segues
- Main content – key segments
- Advertising reads
- A conclusion or sign off
By nature I am a gregarious leader. I like to be visible in my business; I walk the factory floor, talk to people, and regularly visit our overseas offices and logistics centres. This makes the situation so many of us find ourselves in – with restrictions on movement, gatherings and workplace numbers – a difficult one for me. But with some application, thought, and by making the most of remote communication technology, I have been able to sustain both momentum and morale across RØDE Microphones.

**KEEP ONLINE MEETINGS SMALL AND FOCUSED**

Long, rambling meetings are never a good thing in any context, but in an online context, they become even more laborious. Firstly, think hard about the key people you need for any given issue or decision and limit your meetings to include just these people. Secondly, keep meetings focused on a single topic. It’s better to have three or four short meetings – one per topic – with the key people involved in those decisions than to hold one longer, larger conference where at any one time only half the participants are contributing. This might mean splitting your usual management meeting into several shorter meetings, with just a few people at each.

**ENSURE EVERY MEMBER OF STAFF GETS AT LEAST ONE CHECK-IN EVERY DAY**

Working remotely or from home for long periods can be isolating, and staff can easily lose motivation and connection with the business. You can counter this by making sure every member of staff gets a call each day, either from their line manager or a peer, both to ensure they are clear on priorities and work, and also to check-in socially to make sure they are OK.

**HAVE A CLEAR STRUCTURE FOR CASCADING INFORMATION**

Operational matters need to be cascaded through your company structure. From your executive team downwards, ensure that all operational decisions are passed on clearly, from managers to staff throughout the organisation. Stress to your managers at all levels the importance of this. The informal communication networks that we often rely on at work either do not operate, or operate inefficiently by spreading misinformation, in an online situation.

**SPEAK DIRECTLY TO ALL YOUR STAFF**

Whilst operational matters and decision-making meetings should be kept small and tactical, there is a place for wider communications from senior leaders. Choose a tool appropriate for the job. Pulling all your staff into a huge online meeting will almost always be a disaster, both socially and technologically! Instead, think about using tools such as podcasting or a simple video presentation.

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Peter Freedman AM
RØDE Founder & Chairman

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RØDE Microphones

The Choice of Today’s Creative Generation.™

rode.com
This makes them a great option for and reject sound from the rear and sides. to pick up sound directly in front of them its microphone input. They are designed top of your camera and plug directly into ON-CAMERA MICROPHONES audio.

For a simple wireless audio solution, we recommend the Wireless GO. This is a compact wireless microphone system that is incredibly easy to use and delivers pristine audio. Where most wireless microphones require you to use an external clip-on lavaliere (or ‘lapel’) microphone, the Wireless GO features a high-quality microphone built into the transmitter, meaning you don’t have to mess around with cables and a lengthy set up. Just clip the transmitter onto your shirt, jacket or tie, and start recording. Of course, if you prefer using a lavaliere mic, there is an input for this too.

RECORDING ENVIRONMENT

The environment in which you record will have a significant impact on your audio. For example, if you are shooting your video in a noisy environment outdoors with lots of traffic or wind, or if you are recording indoors with lots of hard surfaces and echo, your audio will suffer and may be unusable. It is highly recommended that you record in a controlled environment, with minimal extraneous noise. When recording outdoors, find a quiet place with minimal traffic or pedestrians and that is out of the wind. When recording indoors, pick a room with minimal reflective surfaces. Be sure to avoid hardwood floors or concrete walls, look for rooms with carpet, curtains or bookshelves. Smaller rooms will also help reduce echo.

PRO TIP

When planning and recording your messages, be brutal with your script and/or in your edit. Pare it back to the minimum needed to deliver your message – it will be much more effective. Aim for two minutes or less for a short communication and 20 minutes or less for a long-form presentation.

MICROPHONE PLACEMENT

When recording audio in any situation, it is important to think about the placement of your microphone in relation to the sound source – in most cases, the mouth. As a rule, make sure your microphone is pointed towards the sound source and is as close to it as possible. Of course, what kind of mic you are using will affect how you can place it, but keeping these two factors in mind when setting up to record is crucial. For example, when using a wireless system, make sure the microphone is placed on the chest, not too close to the chin to get clear sound. If you are using an on-camera mic, make sure your subject is not standing too far away from the camera. If this is necessary, consider using a wireless mic.

WATCH YOUR AUDIO LEVELS

It is also crucial that you watch your audio levels on your camera when recording. Most DSLRs will have an audio level meter on the screen. You want to avoid hitting the red section of this meter. There are things you can do to ensure your audio levels are just right:

- Adjust the audio level in your camera’s settings so the meter is going about two-thirds of the way across
- Record in a quiet place
- Ask your subject to talk evenly and not too loudly
- Some microphones have level controls – use these to your advantage!

PRO TIP

8 TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR VIDEOS POP!

Plan in advance
Use plenty of soft light behind the camera and avoid having any light sources behind your camera
Keep your background clean and uncluttered
Think about composition before you start recording

Keep your camera steady and line up the camera with your eye-line
Look into the camera lens as you speak
Consider using subtitles or on-screen text, especially if your video is for social media
Edit as necessary – keep it succinct!

It is always better to have audio that is too quiet rather than too loud. You can always boost the level of your audio in the post-production stage, whereas distorted audio cannot be fixed, and this can be very disappointing when it comes to editing your video.

8 TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR VIDEOS POP!
Tips for Better Microphone Technique

How to Get the Best Sound from 5 Different Types of Microphone

1. **Lavalier (Clip-on) Microphones**
   Lavalier (also known as 'lapel' or clip-on) microphones sound best when clipped onto the middle of the chest – for example, on a shirt, jacket or tie. Clipping too low or too close to the chin will make your audio sound distant or muffled.

2. **Dynamic Microphones**
   Many dynamic microphones exhibit what is known as the 'proximity effect', which is a boost in bass frequencies, when you are close to the mic when speaking. Use this to your benefit to achieve that rich broadcast tone – make sure your mouth is right in front of the microphone capsule, roughly 5cm away from the grill.

3. **Condenser Microphones**
   Condenser microphones are more sensitive than dynamic microphones and will sound clearer when you are a little further back. 10-30cm is a good distance, depending on how strong your voice is. We also recommend using a windshield or pop filter for the cleanest sound.

4. **USB Microphones**
   USB microphones are quite forgiving microphones and will sound great in a wide variety of applications. As many are compact, using a desktop microphone stand or boom arm like the RØDE DS1 or PSA1 will allow you to get nice and close to the microphone for a richer sound.

5. **On-Camera Microphones**
   On-camera microphones, like the RØDE VideoMic range, are called shotgun microphones. This type of microphone is very ‘directional’ and will pick up sound that is in front of them, while rejecting sound from the sides and rear, so when using one, make sure it is pointed directly at your sound source!
BASIC EDITING

processing to improve the quality of but also how to apply some simple podcasting platforms or your website), you’re posting to (social media, learn how to prepare your audio so it’s ‘post-production’, or more simply, ‘editing’.

In this part of the guide, you’ll not only ‘pre-production’, such as Audacity or GarageBand, both of which are free. Even though each of these tools available are based on the same principles.

If you are using a video editing software, such as Premiere Pro or Final Cut Pro, these come equipped with similar audio tools to those we’re about to explain, so you can apply the same theory. However, as all software is slightly different, we recommend taking some time to familiarise yourself with the program. Don’t let this daunt you! They are all very user-friendly and you can find plenty of information about how to use them online.

Creating a Session – The first step is to start a new session in whatever software you are using and create a ‘track’. You will be prompted to do this when you open the program.

Once the session is created, locate the file you want to edit from your desktop, and drag and drop it into the newly created track. Plug headphones into your computer’s headphone port (or audio interface if you are using one).

Now you can click the play button in your software and listen back to your recording to see how it sounds.

Cutting Audio – At this point you’ll likely notice that there are sections of the audio that you might want to cut, whether that’s silence, a cough or a bad take. This can be done by using the cutting tool. By separating the audio and deleting periods of silence or sections you don’t want to keep, you can make sure your recording flows smoothly.

Fading In and Out – Another useful technique is to fade your audio in and out. By doing this, you can ensure that the recording has smooth transitions and none of your listeners are surprised by a sudden peak in volume. Using the automation tool is an easy way to manually fade audio in and out.

Adding More Audio – Once you are happy with your main audio track, you can introduce any number of other sounds to your session, such as music, sound effects or another recording, such as an interview. To do this, create a new track, then drag and drop these new audio files into your session. You can then cut, fade and position these tracks as required.

Balancing Your Levels – Once the different tracks are positioned where you want them, you can balance your levels. Most editing software will have a volume fader for each track — use this to turn down the tracks that are too loud or boost tracks that are too quiet.

Balancing your levels will ensure that all audio is heard clearly. This process is simply known as ‘mixing’.

AUDIO PROCESSING

With your basic editing done, applying some simple audio processing can take your audio to the next level. Dialogue in particular will really benefit from some quick processing.

There are three audio processing tools that will make your voice pop:

Equalisation (EQ) – This is the process of boosting or cutting the volume of certain frequencies in an audio signal to alter its overall tonality, for example, making it bassier or brighter. All editing software has at least one EQ tool, and most will have preset settings for voice recordings. Everyone’s voice is different, so try experimenting with different settings to see what works for you.

Compression – Put simply, compression reduces the dynamic range of an audio signal by turning down the loudest parts of a recording and boosting the softest parts. It is a subtle effect, but applying a compressor will make your voice sound rich and present. Again, try using a preset for voice recordings to see how it affects your voice.

Noise Gate – A noise gate is a handy tool for limiting the amount of background noise, such as traffic or an air conditioner, in your recording. These work by setting a volume ‘threshold’. Anything underneath this will be removed. Set your threshold low and carefully bring it up until you notice the noise you don’t want to hear disappear.

Audio for Business

WHICH EDITING SOFTWARE SHOULD YOU USE?

Mac
- GarageBand (free)
- Logic Pro X (paid)
- Audacity (free)
- Reaper (paid)

Windows
- Movie Maker 10 (Windows)
- Advanced: DaVinci Resolve (free), Premiere Pro (paid)

Online
- Beginner: iMovie (Apple), Movie Maker 10 (Windows)
- Advanced: DaVinci Resolve (free), Premiere Pro (paid)

Video
- Beginner: iMovie (Apple), Movie Maker 10 (Windows)
- Advanced: DaVinci Resolve (free), Premiere Pro (paid)

BASIC EDITING

First, you’ll need to download editing software. We recommend you use a simple digital audio workstation (DAW) such as Audacity or GarageBand, both of which are free. Even though each of these looks different, the tools available are based on the same principles.

In this part of the guide, you’ll not only learn how to prepare your audio so it’s ready for use on whatever medium you’re posting to (social media, podcasting platforms or your website), but also how to apply some simple processing to improve the quality of your audio and the clarity of your message.

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Preparing Your Recording

Now your recording should sound clean and professional. The next step is getting it ready to use for your intended platform, whether that’s for a video on your social media or a podcast.

All this involves is adjusting the overall volume of your recording. If your audio is too quiet or too loud, it will lack impact or be hard to listen to, or may even sound distorted. All editing software will have controls for the master output — that is, the combined output of all of your audio tracks. If you have multiple audio tracks, such as music and sound effects behind the main audio, you need to make sure these sounds are balanced, and the overall output is just right.

This is where a tool called a ‘limiter’ is useful. Using a limiter on your master output will allow you to set a point at which the volume of your recording cannot exceed (this setting is usually called the ‘ceiling’ or ‘output level’), while increasing the loudness of quieter tracks at the same time (this setting is usually called ‘threshold’, ‘gain’ or ‘makeup gain’). This will make your audio sound balanced, not too loud or too quiet.

Apply a limiter to your master track, set the ceiling to around -1dB and the threshold to a level where you can hear all of the elements of your recording clearly (about -4 to -6dB).

Quickly comparing your audio to a similar piece of media, whether that’s a video on YouTube or a podcast, is a good way to ensure the volume of your recording is in the right ballpark.

Once you are happy with the loudness of your audio, save the file then export (or ‘bounce’, as it’s called in some software) the audio file out to your desktop. Now it’s ready for you to use!
WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check the QR code to discover more tips and tricks for getting great audio.